The status of some bird species endemic to south Ethiopia

Per Ole Syvertsen and Yilma Dellelegn

The status of many of Ethiopia's endemic birds are poorly known. Ash & Gullick (1989) gave an assessment of all 28 species, based on a visit to various parts of the country in February and March 1989, and compared the findings with the situation 1969–1977. They concluded that no species, with the probable exception of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii*, was under immediate threat of extinction, and that more than half of the species apparently had not changed status. Prince Ruspoli's Turaco was the only species for which they judged "numbers certainly reduced". Two other south Ethiopian endemic bird species, White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis* and Ethiopian Bushcrow *Zavattariornis stresemanni*, were found not to have changed status (the swallow) or possibly to occur in reduced numbers (the bushcrow).

Several more observers have worked in Borana since then, particularly in the Yabello[1] area. Tesfaye Hundessa stayed in Borana from 27 December 1989 to 5 January 1990, and conducted road counts of bushcrows in several areas (Tesfaye 1991). Yilma Dellelegn stayed in the area from mid March to early June 1990, compiling data for a bird check-list for the Yabello Wildlife Sanctuary (Yilma 1990). The senior author first visited Yabello from 3 to 5 March 1990, and spent a total of more than 11 weeks in Borana during August to December 1990. The purpose of this paper is to report on observations made by these workers on the status and distribution of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco, White-tailed Swallow and Ethiopian Bushcrow.

A map of the western part of the Borana region showing geographic names used in this paper is provided in Fig. 1.

Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii*

This species is only known from a few forest areas north and west of Negele and at Arero (Collar & Stuart 1985). Benson (1942) rediscovered it at Arero in 1941–42, but there seem to be no more recently published record of the species from this locality. Ash & Gullick (1989) visited the Arero area briefly without finding any turacos, but they did not investigate areas north of the town.

In 1990 we were able to confirm that a population of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco still survives at Arero. The species was found at a number of localities within an area of *c.* 30 km^2 immediately to the north of the town (Table 1, Fig. 2). Most observations were of single birds or two together, both in May and in November, but groups of up to 11 individuals were encountered. Observations in November were made at altitudes between 1550 m and 1700 m. The vegetation varied from dense stands of tall *Juniperus procera* to forest clearings and forest-edge with only a few scattered trees. Turacos were invariably found in areas with dense undergrowth that in some places would stand 4–5 m tall. Birds were not particularly difficult to locate or watch.

Further details of the observations made in May 1990 are given by Yilma (1991).

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[1]Ethiopian geographical names are often spelled in different ways in different sources. Hence Yabello, Yabelo, Yavello, and Javello are used in the literature and on published maps, and the regional capital is known as Negele or Neghelli. Borana (or Borena), now one of Ethiopia's largest administrative regions, was previously part of Sidamo province.

Confirmation of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco still occurring in most of its known range may relieve some of the concern expressed by Ash & Gullick (1989). There is no evidence to

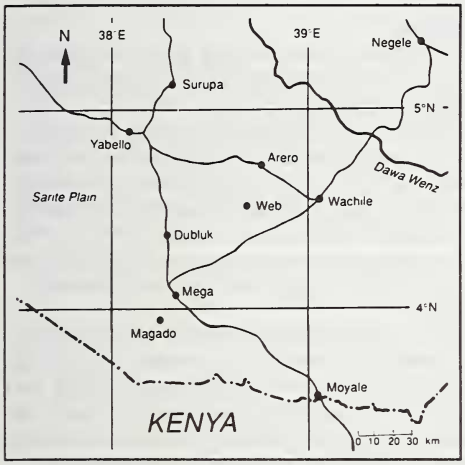

Figure 1. *Map of western Borana with major roads and tracks*

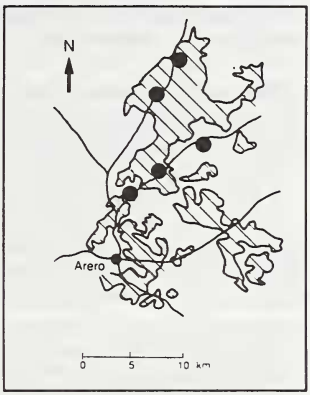

Figure 2. *Observations of Prince Ruspoli's Turaco* Tauraco ruspolii *at Arero in November 1990. Hatched areas are forest patches (after Ethiopian Mapping Agency, map series EMA 3, sheet NB 37-14 Yabelo, edition 1, 1979). Lines show major tracks.*

Table 1. *Observations of Prince Ruspli's Turaco* Tauraco ruspolii *(PRT) and unidentified turacos (sp) at Arero 1990*

Date	Number of birds	Distance from Arero (km)	Altitude (m asl)	Species
25 May	11	?	?	PRT
25 May	1	?	?	PRT
26 May	2	?	?	PRT
26 May	1	?	?	PRT
26 May	1	?	?	PRT
29 Aug	1	8.5	*c.* 1700	sp
c. 8 Sep	1?	?	?	sp
16 Nov	1	13.0	*c.* 1600	PRT
16 Nov	1	19.6	*c.* 1550	PRT
16 Nov	2+	22.0	*c.* 1700	PRT
16 Nov	1	30.9	*c.* 1700	PRT
17 Nov	4	30.9	*c.* 1700	PRT
17 Nov	1	30.0	?	PRT
17 Nov	2	20.4	*c.* 1700	PRT

suggest that the species has declined at the Arero locality. The forest north of Arero, although of small size and fairly isolated, seems to be in good condition. However, the area is likely to come under increased pressure from surrounding human populations for wood cutting and grazing. Understanding of the turacos' ecological requirements is needed if their survival is to be ensured.

White-tailed Swallow *Hirundo megaensis*

The main distribution of the White-tailed Swallow is between and around Yabello and Mega. It has been recorded up to 50 km north of Yabello, 15 km north-northeast of Yabello, and 50 km east and southeast of Mega (Collar & Stuart 1985).

In 1990 we found the species fairly frequent around Yabello and up to *c.* 50 km east-southeast of the town along the road to Arero (at approximately 38°30E) in most months. Our northernmost observation was just south of Surupa, *c.* 35 km north of Yabello. Along the road between Yabello and Mega it was only recorded at Dembalawachu and Dubluk. Further south four White-tailed Swallows were found at three localities up to *c.* 47 km southeast of Mega on 27 August. We saw fewer birds than previous observers in these areas (Ash & Gullick 1989), particularly along the Yabello – Mega road, with a maximum of *c.* 7 along the road between Yabello and Arero.

On 24 August a flock of five White-tailed Swallows was seen feeding in open, lightly bushed grassland at Sarite, *c.* 40 km west of Yabello at an altitude of *c.* 990 m. A new flock of six birds were found in the same area in similar habitat on 16 September. Finally, two White-tailed Swallows were seen at Sarite on 21 November at an altitude of 1000–1100 m. These are the first published observations at any major distance to the west of the road between Yabello and Mega, and at the lowest altitude ever reported for the species.

Group sizes were usually single birds or two together, larger flocks being four birds at Dembalawachu and the first two observations from Sarite. Yilma (1990) observed it flying with House Martins *Delichon urbica* in March.

The species was not found along the Mega – Wachile – Dawa Wenz road on 28 August, nor between Dawa Wenz, Wachile and Arero the next day or between Arero and Negele on 9 October. These areas, of which only a smaller portion is within the species' known range, slope gently from 1400–1600 m at the plains around Arero and Mega to a low of 750 m at Dawa Wenz.

On 1 December the road between Mega and Magado (*c.* 27 km southwest of Mega) was checked without seeing any White-tailed Swallows. Less than 20 km from Mega this road sharply drops from approximately 1500 m to 1000 m. It is generally assumed that this topographical feature helps explain the limited distribution of both this species and the Ethiopian Bushcrow (Benson 1942, Urban & Brown 1971, Collar & Stuart 1985, Turner & Rose 1989), a view that is challenged by the records from Sarite. Although we saw most of the swallows between 1500 m and 1650 m, the altitudinal range was as wide as 990–1700 m. Previous given altitudes have ranged between 1220 m and 1725 m (Benson 1942, Urban & Brown 1971, Collar & Stuart 1985, Ash & Gullick 1989), with occasional observations up to 2400 m.

Ethiopian Bushcrow *Zavattariornis stresemanni*

The range of the Ethiopian Bushcrow is generally the same as that of the White-tailed Swallow. It comprises *c.* 6000 km^2, from 15 km to the north and northeast, 60 km to the east (towards Arero) and 10 km to the west of Yabello, south to 15 km east and 25 km southeast of Mega (Collar & Stuart 1985). Within this range it is considered most common

in the areas immediately around Yabello (Benson 1946, Collar & Stuart 1985, Ash & Gullick 1989). Our own observations, as well as those of Tesfaye (1991), comply fully with the statement that the Ethiopian Bushcrow is most common around and east of Yabello. We never saw them west of the Yabello – Mega road (except for a few km northwest of Dubluk). Further observations on the species' distribution is detailed below.

We recorded the species up to 30 km north of Yabello (near Surupa) in August 1990, no doubt in the same area as Ash & Gullick's (1989) observation 34 km northeast of Yabello. Tesfaye (1991) recorded them in the vicinity of Web (a village 32 km southwest of Arero). On the Mega – Moyale road, we found bushcrows *c.* 44 km southeast of Mega on 27 August. Along the track between Mega and Wachile, they were encountered up to 55 km northeast of Mega on 28 August. We found them up to 16 km southwest of Mega on 1 December (on the road to Magado), only *c.* 3 km from the steep escarpment but still at an altitude of around 1500 m. These observations indicate that the species is wider distributed in the southern part of its range than previously recognised. Its eastern range limit seems to be at approximately 38°30E–38°45E, possibly extending further east in the southern part of the range.

Ash & Gullick (1990) were of the opinion that the Ethiopian Bushcrow had possibly been reduced in numbers since the mid 1970s, although they also considered that at present the species would not seem be under any particular threat. Tesfaye (1991) questions that numbers are reduced, since his own road counts, covering largely the same areas as those Ash and Gullick visited, come up with a five-fold figure compared to theirs. Numbers recorded in August to December 1990 are close to Tesfaye's results. It would therefore seem that bushcrow numbers are still good. Although land use changes have taken place in recent years, including local bush clearing and tree felling, the species seems to be doing well. As for practically all of Ethiopia's endemic birds, however, its ecology is poorly understood.

Acknowledgements

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Second Announcement

Eighth Pan-African Ornithological Congress

Huitième Congrès Panafricain d'Ornithologie

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the venue has been changed to Burundi

Venue:	University of Burundi, Bujumbura	
Dates:	30 September – 5 October 1992	
Registration fees:	up tp 30 April 1992	US$250.00
	from 1 May 1992	US$300.00

8 PAOC Chairman: Dr Michel Louette, Africa-Museum, B-1980, Tervuren, Belgium (Fax: + 32 2 7670242) from whom registration forms may be obtained.

Vice-Chairpersons: Christian Erard, Kim Howell, Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, Trevor Wilson

Chairmen Scientific Programme: Kim Howell and Trevor Wilson

Chairman Local Organizing Committee: Gaspard Ntakimazi

Other Scientific Commission Members of Local Organizing Committee: Laurent Ntahuga and Jean-Pierre Vande weghe

Chairman PAOC Committee: Lester Short.

The International Council for Bird Preservation is an active participant in the Congress